MADE IN NEW YORK

LAST CALLS

"A remarkable little book!"
-THE NEW YORK REVIEW OF ZINES

VINTAGE CONTEMPORARIES

LAST CALLS: *A NEW YORK ZINE*

A song can snag on memory like a fishhook,
reeling in once-forgotten feelings from the depths.
It can also serve as a signpost for a season, a moment
in time that grows significant in retrospect.

During my sixth year in New York, the city's magic finally wore off on me. I became demoralized by the cost of living, the chaos, the ever-changing storefronts, and the profit-driven impermanence of a place that I'd naively begun to think of as my permanent home. On days when I felt particularly sour, I would return to my first New York playlist, which I made shortly after my move in August 2019. It's not a good playlist by any means, but it surfaced core memories: how I would start my Prospect Park runs with Lil Wayne's "A Milli" and Brockhampton's "BOY BYE," saunter through the West Village to HAIM's breezy "Summer Girl," and blast Robyn's "Because It's In the Music" on the empty 4 train at 3 AM. Back then, I liked to lie down on the subway seats and stare up at the roof of the train. It was a gross habit, but I think it was the freest I'd ever felt.

This zine emerged from a desire to remember, to collect friends' New York memories like seashells because, as Bernadette Mayer says, "time is running out, so, you know everything, the whole of it." I am always trying to reach towards the whole of something, even when it's impossible to hold onto. The night, like a song, always ends. Why not make something of it?

—*Terry Nguyen*

Patrick Hamilton

LAST CALLS: A NEW YORK ZINE
Summer 2025-26
Limited Edition: ____/100
Edited by Terry Nguyen

Note: Most of the contributors' entries were written in 2025, back when Zohran Mamdani was a long-shot mayoral candidate and Knicks games were reasonably priced.

CONTENTS

Terry Nguyen ……..... Intro & Misc. Poems

Matthew Ritchie …… A Letter to Seward Park

Ricardo Montero…… Sol del Verano

Akosua T. Adasi……When The Car Radio Is Playing

Patrick Hamilton……. I Have Seven Faces

T.M. Brown …….. Art Star

Sanam Yar …… Abundance In All Its Forms

Cookie Duong ……...Ambient Griefs

Michael Waters ……. Bombay

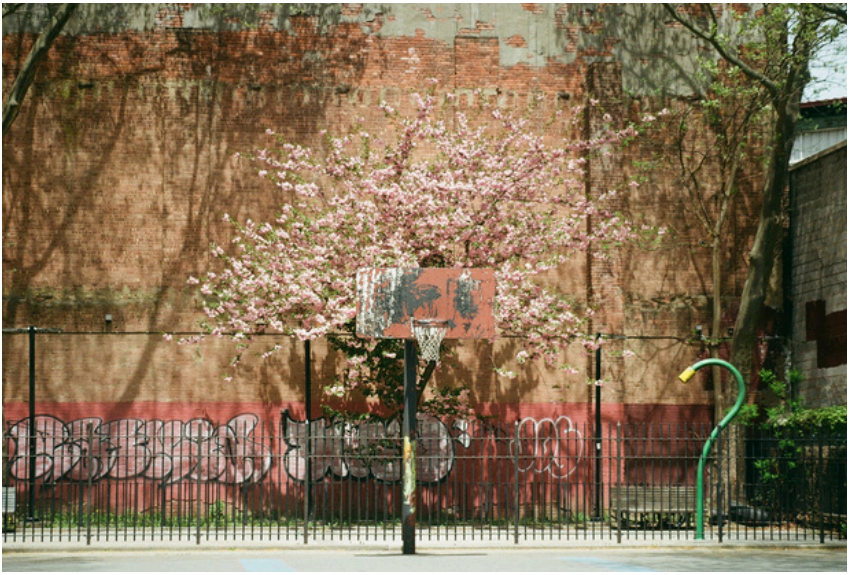
Michelle Santiago Cortés…… Liquid Sky

Aziza Kasumov…… Ashing My Cigarette on Rockaway Beach

Maddie Beecher……A Faraway Look In Our Eyes

Daisy Alioto …… The Polo Bar

Rachel Mikita ……..... All I Want



Matthew Ritchie

I bleed honestly from the left
nostril. Only my right ankle
rolls. It feels wrong that most
of the world is right-handed.
The ambidextrous trees tire
of bearing our loaded initials.

(6/5/26)

A Letter to You From Seward Park

I'd arrive here on accident, if you could believe it. I mistimed my entrance to a movie at the Metrograph that's older than our parents, faced with the idea of loitering in the dimly lit lobby for too long. Passing the time, I'd stroll around the Chinatown/LES demilitarized zone for something to do for 30-35 minutes, aimlessly scrolling Apple Music in the hopes of drowning out the noise of everything—the endless city ambience, the outdoor seating chatter, my own pounding thoughts.

It didn't take long for me to be drawn to the mouth of Seward Park, on the southwest side, where the generational gap between Chinese elders and Gen Z transplants is flattened by the gravitational force of a ping pong table. Early fall feels like the true debutante season for Seward Park, where its towering, sky-scraping trees that barely let in light through the branches are quickly becoming a warmer shade of range, throwing shadows down walkways and playground slides. The universe feels quite small here. Maybe it's the diminutive park size, or the fact that it's almost sequestered from the sounds of the street in its own little world. But you can be sheltered away from whatever needs to be on one of those little green benches.

I'd sit down at one of the benches, or the stone siding by the table tennis arena, and almost subconsciously press play on Anita Baker's *Rapture*. It'd become my go-to album to fill the space in between your leaving and my returning: the awkward middle ground where I subsist on my favorite aspects of you and survive on the memory of your last appearance. Anita Baker is the head songstress for missing

someone, rising above the seductive comfort of melancholy, and into the brave echelon of celebrating the pain and euphoria of loving another person. Among the first sounds you hear on the opener "Sweet Love" sets the stakes from the outset:

"*With all my heart, I love you, baby,*" she belts, rattling your soul before the driving piano composition even has a chance to warm up.

Antoine Vidal

"I'm in love, sweet love (sweet love)
Hear me calling out your name, I feel no shame
I'm in love, sweet love (sweet love)
Don't you ever go away, it'll always be this way..."

Few things brought me more peace than listening to Anita Baker in Seward Park, waiting for my movie of the week to start, people-watching with the foolish hope that you'd appear next to me to do the same. One a day like today, where the sun almost sedates all of the park's inhabitants, there's nothing for anyone to do besides revel in each other's company, or bask in the solitary silence. Anita's voice is a salve, her plain-spoken emotions an antidote to the mess of the world around and inside my head.

She allows you to imagine a time where you can tell the one you love that they bring you joy beyond belief; that they fill your thoughts when they're gone; that as much as you want to return to the way things were, those days are gone for a reason. Stark honesty delivered through a voice that tries to break through the gates of heaven at every end-rhyme. It's the soundtrack of watching those around me look into each other's eyes, or wonder if the ones without a presence next to them are longing for somebody they love to fill the gap to their left, all while Anita rambles about how she just wants to love you, like a base necessity to live.

A glance at the clock reminds me of the movie I'm tied to seeing. I'm only left to thank Seward Park for providing me a temple to remember your being near for a brief moment. More than long enough, by all accounts.

—Matthew Ritchie

Matthew Ritchie

Today can only speak in the conditional;
half-formed thought lodged in throat,
a stubborn hiccup.
Reading book about girls found strangled
in the Mexican desert;
reading poem about disgraced angels
falling from Heaven.
In every man's eyes, a set of daggers:
The challenge of cruelty— make it sing.

(6/11/26)

Sol de Verano

December 2006. 30 Rockefeller Center.

I have been colonized into believing that magnificent sights can only truly be captured by the strings of a violin. I have been conditioned into accepting that classical music is the ultimate expression of beauty and I let the Catholics trick me into thinking that God only listens to the strings section. But that's Christian God's playlist, New York City plays for a different pantheon.

"Sol de Verano" by Dominican percussion master Chichí Peralta is a prayer to New York's deities, a bible to my musical religion and a soundtrack to my first winter. Its structure perfectly mirrors the emotional trajectory of my first few months in the United States, as my sun began to set early and extra layers of clothing made touch feel plastic.

Like the opening violin chords of the song, my first few months in America were a crescendo of isolated melancholy accompanied by a counter melody of curious wonder and something resembling hope. La voz de mi mamá carried me through the harmonic tension of the winter blues. By then her voice had acquired a sustained vibrato that was intensified by the sub-zero temperatures of late December. But there was a harmony that waited for me at the other side of the bridge. New York City, in all her dissonance, fell in time with the percussion of my heartbeat, that would double every time we crossed the asphalted frets of the George Washington Bridge.

The bassline dropped as we drove through Washington Heights. That da-dum-dum—dum from the Dominican Republic nourished me with a flavor I had not tasted since I left Bucaramanga. Cue the maracas as the seeds of my future bounced back and forth between W145th and W135th streets. The congas, leather and wood tensed by the cold, kicked-in as we parked somewhere in Harlem.

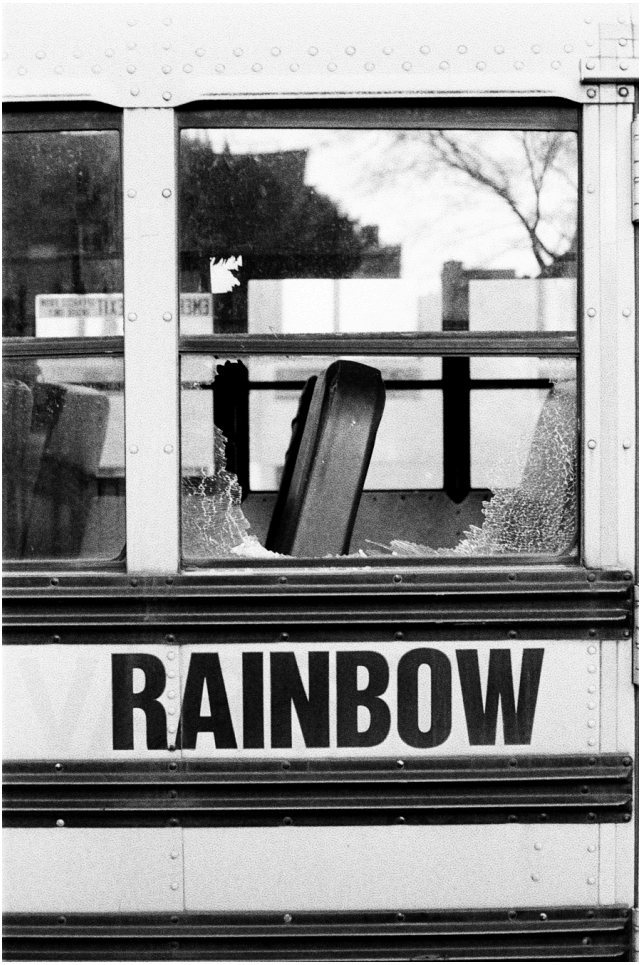
It was Christmas in New York and the immigrant handbook required a visit to 30 Rockefeller Plaza. Being 11-years-old and 4'10 made the biggest buildings I had ever seen even taller, scaled up by the tallest people I had ever seen. Thousands were crowding the street, trying to see the biggest tree I had ever seen. Everything was so big and too tall and so fast and too American. The violin again.

We swam through that swarm and my dad, in an impulsive effort to bring back the drums, said "Mire esto" and knocked on the head of a guy in an Elmo costume, diving back into the crowd before that poor man had any chance to fight him. It sprouted from me the biggest laugh I had had since August, with warm summer tears trailing a path of comfort down my frozen cheeks. Mi mamá, mi sol de verano, watched me and we cried with laughter in unison, for the first time hearing the music together.

We took this picture a few minutes later. Warm together in the foreign, frozen midtown. A hug that put our hearts on the same beat, but her eyes,

her eyes still play the violin for me. —*Ricardo Montero*

Patrick Hamilton



Antoine Vidal

Placeless per usual. Buffet
of skirts in my carry-on. Nothing
you know me in. My buttons undone
by the waxing crescent, the distant veins
in your arms. Tight aisle. Tangerine
like a burnt sun on the tongue.

(6/19/26)

When The Car Radio Is Playing

"It's difficult not to look at the world as if it were a movie when the car radio is playing and there's a red light." —Silvina Ocampo

The first songs you listen to after you step out of the movie theater are the most romantic, feel the most sweeping. That's the cinematic effect—when the dream of the screen seeps out into the open air and soaks everything with a shimmer. This is only an experience you can have when you've gone to the movies alone, when you have passed time with moving images, absorbed.

I love to go to the movies alone. Alone, I don't have to worry about what I'll say to my companion once the credits roll. Alone, I don't have to decide whether I like the movie or not, I can just let the images wash over me.

Metrograph isn't my favorite movie theater in the city but it is the one I go to most often on my own. Although it's easy for that space (and the neighborhood) to feel disingenuous, I still find my jaunts there incredibly romantic. There's even something special about the strong whiff of fish from the vendor next door that fills your nostrils every time you arrive or leave.

Earlier this year, in late winter, I attended a screening of Paul Mazurky's *An Unmarried Woman* at Metrograph. I was a little underwhelmed with the movie, which I had anticipated for a while. About thirty minutes near the end, I started to feel restless and sat through the post-watch chat with Lynne Tillman with my bag tightly gripped in my hand, ready to spring up when it was over. Once I got out

into the unseasonably warm night air, I knew I didn't want to go home but I didn't know where I wanted to go. I decided to just start walking and see where my feet would take me. I ended up at Casetta, a wine bar that is always empty when I need it to be.

As I sipped my frosty glass of white wine, Fleetwood Mac's "Storms" began to play. "Storms" is a song that became very important to me in my twenty-fourth year, which was also the year that I moved to New York. In a season of transition and the first bloom of a new crush, the lyrics "*never have I been a blue calm sea / I have always been a storm*" resonated with me in a way that they had never felt before.

I learnt to be alone as a teenager, when a family move took me away from friends and placed me in a new setting where I was judged as much for what I didn't do as what I did do. But learning to be independent and treasuring my alone time doesn't mean there aren't moments of piercing loneliness. "Storms" is a song that captures that tension within me, between the side of me that is fierce and strongheaded and the side that can look out onto an empty winter street and feel a directionless sorrow.

"Every night that goes between
I feel a little less
As you slowly go away from me
This is only another test

Every night you do not come
Your softness fades away
Did I ever really care that much
Is there anything left to say?"

Patrick Hamilton

That winter night, in the warm glow of the almost empty restaurant, under the spell of white wine and Stevie Nicks crooning "*I should have known from the first, I'd be the broken heartedddd*," it didn't matter what I felt about the movie. Its images of a New York that I felt nostalgic for and had never experienced, had cast a dream glow on the present-day New York that I stepped out into. Sure there was a particular beauty of New York in the seventies that we'll never get back. But there's still beauty to be found in the city, even amongst overpriced restaurants and bankers in Patagonia vests. That beauty offers hope in those lonely moments. This had been the gift of the movie, a gift enhanced by one of the most powerful songs to exist.

—Akosua Adasi

Terry Nguyen

Is it dirty
does it look dirty
that's what you think of in the city

does it just seem dirty
that's what you think of in the city
you don't refuse to breathe do you

from Frank O'Hara's "Song"

I Have Seven Faces

My New York City music story begins in L.A., ironically. In 2003, I was visiting my friend who had moved out there after college to basically do nothing. He had no job yet he was somehow living this fully funded fantasy life that consisted mainly of hanging out with celebrities and going to parties. When he invited me to come and visit, I—dealing with what I now think was a slight depression—jumped at the chance.

My friend was cool. Everything about him: his clothes, his hair, the way he spoke. But most of all the music he listened to. When I arrived in L.A., I felt very uncool and I could feel myself becoming even less so in his presence. One of the days I was there, he decided we would go snowboarding at Bear Mountain. On the drive out, he played two albums back-to-back that would become seminal to my NYC experience during my twenties. One was *Grace* by Jeff Buckley. The other was *Turn On Your Bright Lights* by Interpol. Jeff Buckley had died five years prior and *Grace* had come out a few years before that. How had I not heard this before? I knew I was listening to something special. But then he asked me if I had ever heard of a Brooklyn group called Interpol.

It was a really wild time for music in NYC: the Strokes had just come out of nowhere and were redefining the post-punk culture along with groups like The National, Stellastarr, and Longwave. The Lower East Side had suddenly become the coolest place on earth. I would go to bars like Max Fish and Welcome to the Johnsons and bands would be there, just hanging out and drinking beers.

Terry Nguyen

I saw them all live, too. Concert tickets had not yet become obnoxiously priced and seeing two or three shows a week wasn't unusual. Looking back now, it seemed like music and city life were interwoven in a way that doesn't (or can't) exist today. Shows weren't prohibitively expensive and dozens of now-defunct small venues hadn't been priced out by greedy landlords. It was a wonderful time for live music.

In the middle of all this, *Turn On Your Bright Lights* was released. It's a strange album, riding the post-punk wave while also doing something unique (I have seen them labeled as French Indie, whatever that is). There were very few radio-friendly hits and plenty of drawn-out, repetitive songs which usually don't appeal to the masses. Yet, somehow, the album became a hit. It's undeniably catchy and cohesive. In a time of musical greatness, it stood out.

One song in particular, called simply NYC, is particularly haunting. It's atmospheric and beautiful, but also interestingly ambiguous. It's about both connection and the lack thereof in the massive titular metropolis. It's a song that's less about what happens in the city, and more about what it feels like to live there. The song begins:

I have seven faces. / Thought I knew which one to wear.
I'm sick of spending these lonely nights / Training myself not to care.

But the hopelessness turns at the refrain, when "New York cares" is repeated over and over. Ultimately, it's this strangely uplifting message, somewhat out of character with the band's general lyrical ethos. It's gorgeous.

In early 2004, I saw them play live at a venue called Roseland Ballroom, which closed in 2013. The band came out in fitted, slightly mod suits, looking very serious, and played an incredible show. They closed with NYC. It was the coolest NYC had ever been and I was right there.

—Patrick Hamilton

Patrick Hamilton

Art Star

This isn't a story to convince you how cool I was as a teenager nor is it a way to remind myself that I used to take risks. It also, maybe, is one those memories that might be implanted by the ravenous appetite of youth for tall tales, but back before the Yeah Yeah Yeahs and Karen O were telling you they didn't love you like she loved you, they were playing grungy songs flecked with the filaments of heavy metal and hardcore. We snuck in from the Connecticut suburbs, huddling in the rancid Metro North bathrooms to avoid the conductor, and went to Union Pool where the Yeah Yeah Yeahs were headlining. Yeah, the bar has been around that long.

"Art Star" was what I wanted. The CMJ sampler CD I had gotten a few months before the gig showed it to me. Karen O sounded like a feral member of the Lollipop Guild. If her growling "art star" over and over again made her vocal chords bleed you got the sense the cuts would taste of cherries.

Outside, we smoked Camel Turkish Delights—a Frappuccino cigarette if there ever was one—convinced of how mature we were. Most of us had tattoos etched by bored looking artists on MacDougal. We, of course, looked exactly as old as we were. The show could have very well been all ages, or the guys working the door at Union Pool just didn't care enough to send us home. The room vibrated in a way I wouldn't understand until many years later. The kind of humming frequency they use to crack open rocks or pulverize kidney stones or separate gold from dust.

They played "Art Star" somewhere in the middle of the set that night. Karen's face was obscured by her mask of raven-colored bangs, snarling the chorus. It looked like her head was devouring the mic. We left, taking the late train back across the suburban border and back to small lives. Union Pool still feels like it rattles with Karen O's voice every time I go back, her voice ricocheting off the walls
like machine gun fire.

—T.M. Brown

Antoine Vidal

Abundance In All Its Forms
October 27, 2018. My Williamsburg bedroom.

There is a demo of the song "Honey" by the Swedish singer Robyn that only exists in the final season of "Girls," Lena Dunham's send-up of being young and alive in New York City. Her fans have pain-stakingly stitched together full versions of the track because Robyn never released it officially. I will forever be grateful, though, for the version she did release over a year later, and how magical it was to hear it for the first time at 24 years old.

Even then, I knew how rare and special this period of my life was. "Girls" wasn't aspirational, but for one glorious year in New York, I lived a fantasy version of it. Fresh out of grad school, I moved with my two friends into a miracle apartment in Williamsburg. I knew the neighborhood's reputation—long before Hermès and Chanel opened up shop—but for New York transplants in their early twenties, it was a kind of paradise. My room had a fire escape overlooking our neighbor's magnolia tree.

On our first night in the apartment, soaked in July sweat, we used a moving box as a dinner table for Joe's pizza and toasted with IPAs. It's not an original experience, but it was the beginning of something. Our home had a tool set, we felt so adult. We were three journalists—a Canadian, a Malaysian, and a Californian—who'd seen the movies about go-getter girlbosses making it in Manhattan. And we were strivers, too.

2018 was a revolving door of internships, freelancing, and getting our first major bylines. Despite the hustle, life was fun. We decorated our walls with pages we ripped from vintage cooking magazines and postcards we found at the thrift store. Snapshots from our many themed parties (the '90s, "The Matrix," the '70s) adorned our fridge. We stayed out late and trudged home barefoot (this happened only once I think, on my 25th birthday) and bought hot dogs at a place that's now a vape shop. Together, we could turn any random evening into a canon event—one of us would even meet her future husband at Union Pool that year.

One such night, we crawled home at 5 AM from a Halloween party and perched in my room. Robyn had released her long-awaited album, "Honey," the night before. One of us passed out on the bed, the other played with a plastic lobster of unknown origin, and I slowly unpinned the $10 Ariana Grande ponytail wig from my head. We pressed play.

"Honey" is the second-last track of the album. To me, it sounds like the delicious snap of fall air, staying up late texting a crush, shared lives overflowing with possibility and love. I was aware that this period of our friendship, where we meant everything to each other, was fleeting, but I wanted to hold it in my hand forever. I built a snow globe of that moment in my mind, something I could return to. New York had lived up to its promise, how could I be so lucky? How could life be this full and good?

The following year, we saw Robyn perform "Honey" at Madison Square Garden. Our lives were changing: I'd landed a dream job, one of us was moving abroad, and another was falling in love for the first time. Of course our friendship evolved.

Still, when I listen to this album, I see it all over again, the supercut of our New York twenties. Hungover journeys for bagels, gossiping about the night before, maybe sacrilegiously, on church steps. A never-ending stream of friends crashing on our couch. The three of us sprawled out in McCarren Park, the sun on our faces.

—*Sanam Yar*

Matthew Ritchie

Then too young to understand
her life of flaxen habits. My mother
never opened the door for strangers
nor cared to sunscreen her knees.
What does it mean to live
duty-free? Tell the man in the gray suit,
I refuse to follow his clocks.

(6/13/26)

Ambient Griefs

In my favorite Facebook group, aptly named "Hell's Kitchen Neighbors," the grief for places that used to be gets passed down from older residents to newer ones like me. Paddy's Market, once the bustling commercial heart of a growing ethnic community, gets a wistful post. So does the tribute for 24-hour diner on 44th Street that was familiar to me from my walks down 9th Ave. But it was the exchange over the last reservations at Chez Napoleon—the beloved, family-run French restaurant just across the street from where I live on 50th—that stopped me. Its last day of service was at the end of January. The space still stands empty.

In March, I brought a leather belt to an old Kyrgyzstani cobbler on 9th avenue to have him fix its length. His shop was an explosion of controlled chaos, but he knew exactly where to find the photo album as we chatted—flipping straight to a picture of his wife as a young woman, insisting I looked just like her. I asked how he'd managed to keep his shop open on such a high-traffic block, having just watched him list off all the neighbors who hadn't. He laughed, wouldn't give me a number, but the laugh told me enough. He's there most days, past ten hours at a stretch.

Three years into living here, I've learned to recognize this ambient grief before it's even announced: another Amazon-owned Whole Foods market taking over a street corner, another generic Verizon counter where a family business used to be, another restaurant backed by private equity, its profits headed somewhere else. The public square feels smaller each time, and we retreat to digital ones instead—the Facebook group standing in for the block we no longer share. That's the agonizing joy of living in New York right now: taking turns writing epitaphs to edifices, one neighborhood at a time.

—Cookie Duong

Terry Nguyen

Matthew Ritchie

Patrick Hamilton

Terry Nguyen

Bombay

The right time to listen to "Bombay" by Girl Ultra is when you're leaving the venue, when your ears are ringing and your arms are slicked with sweat and there's a wooziness to your field of vision. "Bombay" is the perfect after-hours song, a whispering club hit that never quite crescendos. It makes even the train ride home feel hypnotic.

"Bombay" has become my soundtrack to Hadramout, a 24-hour Yemeni restaurant on the border of Cobble Hill. On the walk over, with some substance or another still lingering in my system, even Atlantic Ave starts to glitter a little brighter. Hadramout can sometimes feel like its own slipped reality—a basement-level restaurant where, at 3 am, entire families might be piled into booths. I've gone to Hadramout with boyfriends and friends, debriefed dance floor encounters and untangled backstories of the night's cast of characters.

It is the rare place in Cobble Hill where something is always happening and someone is always high. It is also the ideal place to experience that time of night when you go internal, and all you want to do is sit across from someone you love and trade secrets. After the club, after the train ride home, everything feels a little silly. Which is why the winking lyrics of "Bombay" always seem to land: "Nos ponemos high, touch the sky."

—Michael Waters

Antoine Vidal

St. Mark's Place caught at night in hot summer,
Lonely from the beginning of time until now.
Tompkins Square Park would be midnight green but only hot.
I look through the screens from my 3rd floor apartment
As if I could see something.
Or as if the bricks and concrete were enough themselves
To be seen and found beautiful.
And who will know the desolation of St. Mark's Place
With Alice Notley's name forgotten and
This night never having been?

Alice Notley (1945-2025)

Liquid Sky
7.16.2024

A terrible congestion headache. I feel the skin of my face tighten over the bubbles of mucus and snot sliding under the surface like the insides of a melted ice-pack. It couldn't possibly be any hotter, or cloudier or more humid. I saw online that a meteor exploded over Midtown this morning, and I texted my sister to confirm he was okay. There isn't enough synth music in the world to make any of this better but I made a playlist anyway: 008. Apocalyptic synths and steamy drum machines. Angsty industrial rock and enough Trent Reznor and Atticus to make it feel like I'm in on the joke. I'm sitting naked on my sublet floor, in front of a feeble fan that can't do much to the fat drops of humidity fogging up the windows and down my chest, chin, forearms, brow, and walls.

My phone's battery is pushing excess heat through the cracks in its glass. My laptop (the I bought just after my last one died of its first New York summer in 2018 summer) is also over-heating. The screen is completely fucked, glitching in hot-green stripes accross a ghost grid. The top component has been replaced at least twice. The ribbon cable has a history of crapping out on me, and the butterfly keyboard it connects to has already earned me a small claim from a 2021 class-action lawsuit.

I just need a very small drill. A sterile one I can just press into my temple and make a burr hole, to relieve intracranial pressure, like the ones shown on "Grey's Anatomy." A bit of friction to decongest and let out some of the ooze. A bit of friction, a bit of heat, a bit of mess, a bit too much. A bit more than I'm willing to deal with today.

—Michelle Santiago Cortés

Terry Nguyen

daydream a white
room by the sea
familiar as old pictures
unhooked from time
I grow diffident &
shear my bangs easy
forgetting your sun
worn face

(6/09/26)

Ashing My Cigarette on Rockaway Beach

In my mid-twenties, I spent several years under the profound delusion that, within a few months' time, I would move out of my Clinton Hill apartment and relocate to Rockaway Beach, where I would buy beachfront property and live out my days as a (mostly solitary) novelist. In the summers, I would greet Danny DeVito cruising by my bungalow in his golf cart; the winters I'd spend grittily walking my imaginary dog along the deserted Atlantic shoreline, pondering the depth of my existence and what kind of Ottolenghi stew I would throw down on the stove that night. I would learn how to surf, obviously.

My fantasy of living on the edge of the continent did not start with Rockaway, but in Rockaway it found its most vivid and prolonged fixation. When I investigate this fantasy today, from the vantage point of my very-late-twenties, what attracted me most, I think, about leading such a life was the sensation of smallness that I've always felt when positioned against a large body of water. I grew up in the most landlocked place in Europe, constrained on all sides by landmass and landfills while suffocating on physical and emotional trash.

When I moved to California at age 18 and found myself on the edge of the Pacific Ocean, I thought, for the first time in my life, that everything bad that had ever happened to me, and that I had ever done to anyone, wasn't all that important in the grand scheme of things. In Big Sur, Jack Keourack's alter ego ashes "my little Camel cigarette on a billion year old rock," asking himself: "what is death anyway in all this water." Yes, what is death–but, more so, what is life? In all this water and all this billion-year-old

rock, our lives become the granular pebbles in the sand, the tenth decimal of an already negligible numerical figure. At 18, the revelation of my own unimportance was liberation. Except that I drew all the wrong conclusions from it.

After college I left California and moved to New York, where I found myself quasi-landlocked again: my Brooklyn apartment was demarcated on all sides by major traffic avenues, the gardens I was overlooking from my bedroom windows were nothing more than a collection of walled-in backyards. No eternal expanse to disappear against. I love New York, and yet I found myself, within three months of getting here, desperate for proximity to water: I fled first to Cuba and the Bahamas, then I discovered Rockaway Beach. I began heading out there regularly during the summer, floating on my back, swaddled by the eternal wave patterns. For my birthdays, I started dragging friends out there, with whom I'd get so deliriously drunk that we ended up skinny-dipping in the November Atlantic–a small window into the kind of reckless behaviour that I mistook for the rightful ecstasy of youth back then.

Last year I didn't go to Rockaway for my birthday. Instead I stayed in a hotel room with a man who had cheated on his wife with me and, though separated, was still legally married. I was drunk–as I was for much of our relationship–and free-falling into the kind of reckless desire you'd have to be high off your own irrelevance to tolerate. Except that I did end up breaking up with him–and then spent the following six months asking myself what on billion-year-old rock I'd been thinking, not only during that relationship, but for most of my twenties.

What had I been thinking every time I carelessly hurt the people I loved, and pursued the people I didn't? How delusional was I when I seriously believed I would move out to Rockaway–and that Danny DeVito would ever give a shit about me? Why did I find, for so long, solace in the idea of my own crushing insignificance?

The last time I've been to Rockaway on my birthday was two years ago–the year before the hotel room–when I'd tracked out there by myself right after dumping a guy I'd been half-heartedly dating for a month. It was a rainy day, and once I got to the beach, I realized there was nauseating construction going on all along the boardwalk to expand hurricane protections for the peninsula. The water behind the tractors and pipes looked shallow and gray, as if exhausted from its never-ending dance of longing and retreating. I left again after twenty minutes. And despite the self-negating experiences I would continue to get myself involved in over the course of the subsequent months, like my relationship with the married man, I think this was ultimately the moment I first began to tire of my Rockaway fantasy. I realized I didn't want to ash my cigarette on a billion-year-old rock. I wanted to quit smoking, and start treating my life and the people in it like they actually mattered.

—Aziza Kasumov

Antoine Vidal

A Faraway Look In Our Eyes

Dear friends and (former) lovers in New York,

I miss you. I miss New York. I'm on another adventure, another leap of faith I've taken in a new place. I've been revisiting one of my favorite songs, "Faraway Look" by Yola, as I enter this chapter away.

I first stumbled upon "Faraway Look" in early 2020. I was diving into Americana while traveling through the Great Plains after my job reassigned me from Des Moines to San Antonio. I left my life on the East Coast seemingly for a professional opportunity, but in reality I was bored, lonely, and looking to electroshock myself with exploration.

While driving across the flatlands of Kansas, Yola's neo-soul, country rock single came on autoshuffle. My dad was at the wheel, leading us down a one-lane highway at dusk. I had my eye out the window, mystified by the terrain. I felt like I could reach out and touch the horizon with my bare hands, yet it was neverending, never close enough.

In the lead song off her debut album, Yola creates a cinematic feel with slow burning verses leading to a rousing, booming chorus as she describes a loved one who is caught up in "the dreams that live inside [their] head." As Yola detailed her companion's desire for a big, beautiful life, I felt myself grappling with being unsatiated by my latest adventure, earnestly dreaming up a new challenge for myself. Like many before me, I returned to the fantasy of New York, tantalized by a few prescient summers spent in the city during college. But, I pushed the idea down as I passed through Oklahoma into Texas and recalibrated myself for the adventure directly in front of me. It wasn't enough.

When I moved up to New York in 2022 after a bad breakup, I finally felt free of the chains that had tied me down, yet burdened by the knowledge I had stifled my desire for more for so long. I drove up the New Jersey Turnpike and turned on Yola for the first time since Kansas.

Over my aging speaker she asked me once again, "Are you haunted and wanting more?" And then I got to New York.

"Faraway Look" captures the effervescence of driving over the Williamsburg Bridge at 3AM, head out of the cab, looking back on the city behind you, marveling at its bigness that we are lucky to be a part of for a moment in time. Of holding onto the center pole on a zooming subway, balancing on stiletto heels with confidence, willing it to move faster. Of getting out of the train station as the sun hits your face, along with any of the ordinary New York smells and sounds I find myself romanticizing today. Of movement – in, around, or toward something big.

But when I think of a moment that connects me most to this song, I think of walking my dog, Shadow, on one of our daily loops in Brooklyn, headphones in and sunglasses on, marveling at the brownstones and the people around me. Wondering who every passerby truly is. Realizing I get to be a part of it.

Sometimes it feels like I have this internal gearshift that requires me to be constantly chasing some undefined end. It usually comes in the form of a short-term stint in a new locale. Sometimes it means I'm moving to an entirely new place. New York is the only place I've known that captured that unquenchable desire for more. There's camaraderie in the fact that we all have a faraway look in our eyes. I'll miss it as I embark on these next months in the Upper Valley, muscle memory of chasing the thrill taking over while I'm away from the place I love most.

Come visit me in the mountains. I'll be looking out for you.

—Maddie Beecher

Terry Nguyen

The Polo Bar

All lines taken directly from Yelp and Tripadvisor reviews of The Polo Bar at 1 E 55th St, New York, NY 10022.

After 7 days
A lady standing under a
Stunning equestrian hunter
Unites the frontier with the erudite

I found it strange being summer
Mismatched portraits, fireplaces,
Lots of pretty people
A crab tart
Fort Knox

It was like the Pope blessed it himself
Down to the peppermills
Fresh bed from a basket
The lovely lady
The guy from Morocco
A family of horse lovers

They instantly know
The place to be in the upper
Terrible feeling that money buys
So good luck
Moscow
With a splash of lemon

(Not a fish place)
To cut a long story short,
We always cherish the most difficult things to attain
Like having a conversation in an elevator
I'm laughing now

Who doesn't know what snapper is?
(Maybe I'm sensitive.)
The lovely lady
Willing to accommodate a child's requests
A dessert which was fabulously sickly

Another time and another place
She could have frozen the entrails off a rabbit
Finally prompting me to seek out the barman,
The guy from Morocco

Another time and another place
Never had to search for him
Outside the Tokyo tuna auction
Packed to the gills
Greeted a million times

A few years from now you'll only recall the ambience
Sans the cigar smoke
The iced prawns were heaven
Fresh and briny

I'm laughing now
Huge steaks, lots of wasps
A family of horse lovers
Conversations of their young children
fall on deaf ears

I can certainly live a very happy life
It's no secret
I can certainly live a very happy life
I would rather have had just an apology

— *Daisy Alioto*

Terry Nguyen

ALL I WANT

Blue sea stones rolled smooth
before the long drive pulled

metal tides for the last time
down the spit slicked highway

according to the ceiling colors
I was in love most of the time

standing dazed over the sink
you lounged on Halloween

smoking your fine borrowings
into the orange ashtray too high

to reach the end of the block
tell me again why? beckoned

again by darkening green you fell
asleep walking on Eastern Parkway

where I still smell shampoo
fresh bright and clean

— *Rachel Mikita*

FAILING AND FLYING

A solstice supernova
only the ants can see:
Two fireflies singeing
their wings off,
the remains opaque
as pencil shavings
some careless kid
might eat. They were
fucking the way bugs do,
quivering above the ash
tray. Alive on buggy desire,
a one-way flight to nowhere.

What possessed you to tear
up my best stocking
to tie like a sailor
scarf around your neck?
What possessed me to think
I was old enough to know
any better? I know nothing
about bugs, except their bites.
I understand you more
after you've left. Let the record
spin on. I don't remember much
else besides the song
was *Our Song*—
the album *Something Wild.*

— *Terry Nguyen*

Terry Nguyen

Side stitch from laughing too hard—
Your stye, suspicious in its redness.
Yesterday's argument sidelined by light
creasing a dog-eared page;
the wind-swept moment important
as a sentence I'd soon forget.

(6/4/26)

2026